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FBI probes Moscow embassy employees for leaks

By Bill Gertz
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FBI Director William Webster has informed Congress that several current and former civilian employees of the U.S. Embassy in Moscow are under investigation by the FBI for possible criminal violations related to security leaks.

Mr. Webster, in a letter to Sen. Ernest Hollings, South Carolina Democrat, stated that "all of these investigations are being conducted in a timely and thorough manner."

The FBI probe covers possible violations of federal law, including a section of the U.S. espionage statute dealing with the loss of U.S. secrets due to "gross negligence," Mr. Webster stated.

After a meeting with the FBI director, Mr. Hollings announced on the Senate floor Friday that he was withdrawing his objections to Mr. Webster's confirmation as CIA director. A vote by the full Senate is expected early this week.

"I'm assured a very thorough and vigorous investigation is going on," Mr. Hollings told reporters.

Mr. Hollings said there had been "a general breakdown of discipline and responsibility and perhaps criminal conduct" by civilian offi-

cials at the Moscow embassy.

One administration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said "about six" cases involving civilian embassy personnel were referred to the FBI as part of an ongoing investigation of Marine security guards once posted to Moscow.

The investigations have focused on all U.S. personnel who served in Moscow over the past few years, said the official.

The half-dozen cases that were turned over to the FBI involve unauthorized fraternizations with Soviet nationals that went unreported and other unspecified security violations, said the official.

None of the cases, which are still in the preliminary stage, involve spying allegations, the official said.

"But there are some fraternization cases that may turn into espionage cases," said the official. "We don't know at this point."

About 100 civilians normally are posted at various jobs in the Moscow embassy. There are about 30 Marines stationed with the Moscow security guard detachment.

"We're just beginning the civilian side of the inquiry," said the official. "And we're likely to see quite a few more cases in the weeks ahead."

Mr. Hollings in the past two weeks has pressured the administration to investigate whether civilians were involved in security breaches at the Moscow embassy.

Officials said the Naval Investigative Service will remain the lead agency in the probe, which began December with the arrest of Sgt. Clayton J. Lonetree, a Marine guard once posted at the Moscow embassy.

Sgt. Lonetree and another Marine guard, Cpl. Arnold Bracy, have been charged with espionage for allegedly permitting Soviet agents inside the U.S. Embassy in Moscow.

A third Marine guard has been charged with violating regulations against fraternizing with Soviet bloc women. A fourth Marine guard is being held on suspicion of espionage relating to events in 1981 at the U.S. Consulate in Leningrad.

Preliminary hearings in Sgt. Lonetree's case are scheduled to resume today at the U.S. Marine base in Quantico, Va.

Officials have said the government's case against the Marines appeared to be weak because NIS investigators mishandled evidence and interrogations of defendants and witnesses.

According to defense attorneys, statements made to NIS investiga-

tors by Cpl. Bracy constitute a major portion of the case against Sgt. Lonetree and Cpl. Bracy. Defense lawyers said Cpl. Bracy recanted his statement a short time after it was made.

Another witness against the two Marine guards charged with espionage has recanted previous testimony, according to military officials.

White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater acknowledged last month that the administration is facing "legal problems" with the Marine case. Without providing details, he told reporters April 27 that President Reagan was informed that "there may be difficulties" in prosecuting the espionage cases.

"It's an ongoing problem," Mr. Fitzwater said at the time. "The president is certainly concerned about the quality of the investigation and the cases in the sense that we want to prosecute whoever has been involved in espionage activity."

Meanwhile, Navy Secretary James Webb last week traded barbs with the State Department over the embassy security scandal.

Mr. Webb, in a published interview, accused former Ambassador to Moscow Arthur Hartman of "indifference" toward embassy security that "allowed the penetration by the KGB to occur."

The State Department issued a statement Friday attacking Mr. Webb for undermining department efforts to solve the security problems.

Department Spokeswoman Phyllis Oakley defended Mr. Hartman as a distinguished career diplomat who has been "a model of dedication to the national interest."

Mr. Hartman, in a cable from Moscow in November 1984, called White House counterespionage proposals "counterproductive." He ridiculed efforts to strengthen embassy security as the work of "right-wing" officials out to undermine U.S.-Soviet ties. Mr. Hartman left Moscow earlier this year.

Mr. Webb said the former Moscow ambassador allowed known Soviet KGB intelligence officers to operate freely inside the embassy.

"His theory was it's better to have them in the tent rather than out of the tent," Mr. Webb said.

Mr. Hartman denied the allegations and criticized the Marine security guard detachment for their behavior in Moscow. Marines in the past jogged through Moscow's Red Square "with offensive slogans on their shirts," he told reporters.